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ABSTRACT

Stereotyping is associated with fixed, unchanging points of view based on generalizations and results from the fact that, in his life, a person encounters many different personalities and groups about which he has little information. A stereotype reaction is not based on first-hand information about an individual, but rather on perceived cultural affiliations. It is basically an emotional response that tends to distort message decoding and interfere with understanding of persons and messages. An individual perceived to be from a different social or cultural group will be stereotyped as having the same personal traits as those perceived to be "typical" of the group as a whole. Changes in stereotype perception are directly related to actual changes in the nature or structure of social or cultural groups instead of direct, sensory knowledge about individuals. (RN)

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A REVIEW AND RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF STEREOTYPING BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

Since Lippman's introduction of the concept of stereotyping behavior, psychologists, sociologists, and communication theorists have integrated the concept into their disciplines. This paper presents a theoretical reformulation which specifies inherent units and the relationships among those units in this communication response behavior. Theory and research provide ample rationale for reconceptualizing the stereotype. Apparently, stereotyping is a relatively unchanging, emotionally loaded signal response which potentially distorts decoding and accuracy of understanding. The content of the stereotype--personality, intellectual, and physical characteristics of persons--is derived from perceived socio-cultural affiliations rather than direct sensory experience with the referent. The generalized nature of the stereotype response is, therefore, a result of assigned learning through association with other verbal or nonverbal symbols whose content is conditioned in perceived group affiliations. As a result, the rate of change for stereotypes is closely linked to perceived group affiliations and societal change. The process of stereotyping may be viewed as a transitory system state characterized by the above conditions.

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A REVIEW AND RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF STEREOTYPING BEHAVIOR

The essence of the contemporary concept of stereotyping was introduced to psychology in 1922, but the use of the term dates back to 1798.¹ At that time a French printer, Herman Didot, introduced a new printing process which involved making a casting of type set in plaster. This process he called stereotyping after the Greek word meaning solid, hard, or firm.² His contemporaries extracted the characteristics of "fixedness" and "unchangingness" and began using the term stereotype to refer to unchanging cognitions of actions, conditions, events, etc. By 1922, the use of the term had been introduced into psychology by Lippman.³ Lippman described the stereotype as "...an ordered, more or less consistent picture of the world to which our habits, our capacities, our comforts, and our hopes have adjusted themselves."⁴ Giffin and Patton,⁵ Bem,⁶ Minnick,⁷ Weaver and Strausbaugh,⁸ and other contemporary theorists also focus their explanations of stereotypes around this concept of generalization. Bogardus explained the idea simply when he wrote,

Stereotypes arise out of the fact that the variety of personalities and of groups are so numerous that it is almost impossible for most people in a busy world of activities to weigh every reaction of every person.⁹

While we may generalize as a result of too many stimuli, Guardino¹⁰ notes that individuals also generalize to adjust for a lack of information about various stimuli. As a result, a stimulus person's "membership in a category is sufficient to evoke the judgment that the stimulus person possess all the attributes belonging to the category."¹¹ This basic characteristic of generalization appears to be the basis of contemporary theorists' explanations of stereotypes.

A closely related area of theory and research is that of "person perception." Scholars in this area have investigated structured, stable, and meaningful experiences of other people. They have been concerned predominantly with variables and processes related to accuracy, impression formation, and attribution.¹² More recently "research in person perception has shifted in interest from the stimuli and the accuracy with which they are recorded to the ways that perceivers actively process those stimuli to create interpersonal meaning."¹³ The stereotype can be considered to be a subset or particular kind of person perception which has been treated only briefly by the person-perception theorists.

Although the stereotype is frequently designated as a generalized decoding tendency which may interfere with accurate perception and understanding, little differentiation among the constituent aspects and processes involved in stereotyping are developed by communication (or person-perception) theorists. Rather, they appear to consider the stereotype as a single, unique unit of behavior. However, theory and research have expanded Lippman's basic definition. This discussion views the stereotype as an oversimplified "summative unit"¹⁴ of decoding theory and therefore, attempts a theoretical reformulation which specifies inherent units and the relationships among those units in this communication response behavior. A current model appears to involve at least six basic aspects.

Direct Information

First, the content of the stereotype is based upon no firsthand information. Although this aspect of the stereotype may be primarily definitional, it allows

for an initial differentiation between stereotyping and other person-perception processes. According to Osgood, content or meaning can be derived in two ways. First, one can derive it from direct sensory experience; or it can be derived from assigned learning, the learning by association with other signs.¹⁵ Research suggests the latter alternative for stereotype information derivation. For example, Hiuchiro¹⁶ studied the perception of 420 college students at Tokyo University of a racial subgroup known as the Aino. Employing the Katz-Braley¹⁷ Adjective List (contains personality, intellectual, and physical characteristics; i.e., clean, sloppy, intelligent, etc.), Hiuchiro found a high degree of agreement among the students on the five basic characteristics which described the Aino. At the same time, he reported that students rarely had any firsthand contact with the Aino. He concluded that intergroup communication or perhaps the mass media were responsible for the information content of the stereotype.

Similarly, Norstebø¹⁸ tested the difference in perception of stereotypes of foreign national groups according to age among 800 children. He reported that there was a significant difference between the perception of stereotypes by the age extremes of his sample (ages 11-14). However, within the age group extremes, there were high degrees of agreement on characteristics. Immediately after marking an active list, the children were asked to indicate the source of the information about the foreign groups. He concluded that the source of knowledge for the stereotypes (German, Turk, Italian, etc.) among the older children was the educational process, while for the younger children, it was the family. This research, like that of Hiuchiro, appears to confirm the assigned learning characteristic of the stereotype. Most research has ignored this aspect; however, it appears that the stereotype is not a mephidic concept,¹⁹ but rather a natural outgrowth of the manner of memory storage in the mind.

Presence of Content on Personal Characteristics

While the stereotype appears to result from assigned learning on the basis of no direct information, this absence of direct information appears to be categorically related to the presence of a certain type of content. The content itself appears to be composed of consistent, homogeneous perceptions of personality, intellectual, and/or physical characteristics of persons. Vinake²⁰ posited this proposition and research appears to bear out his conclusion. Theory and research in person perception also indicates that perceptions of these variables are dominant in our reactions to other person.²¹

Mitzer²² apparently conducted the first empirical research in this area when he examined the perception of an 'ideal' among 200 problem children. Mitzer asked, "Who is the greatest man who ever lived? And why?" He discovered a frequency of personal characteristic response which he labeled a stereotype of an ideal. (The children responded in 72% and 64% of the cases, Jesus and A. Lincoln, respectively.)

Soon after, Katz and Braley²³ tested the perceived characteristics of ten race and nationality groups. They employed a procedure which has become a widely used measurement technique for stereotype research--the adjective check list. Three hundred and thirty-four Ss were asked to note the ten stereotypes given and from the list or from their mind select all the characteristics which described the groups (Negro, German, Italian, Japanese, etc.). They were then told to mark only five characteristics which best described the group. Katz and Braley found a very high level of agreement for the five adjectives chosen for each stereotype.

Thus, there appeared to be fairly homogeneous agreement on personal characteristics associated with the groups and the characteristics referred to personality, intellectual, and physical traits. A replication of the Katz-Braley study employing identical procedures was conducted by Meenes²⁴ at Howard University. The Katz-Braley research replicated; he found significant agreement on stereotype characteristics among test groups. Seago²⁵ also attempted a partial replication of the Katz-Braley study but employed only three nationality and one race group references. She also found a high degree of agreement on the five most important characteristics about the racial and nationality groups.

Prothro²⁶ reported six studies regarding the characteristics of the stereotypes of national and ethnic groups. His survey of businessmen, students, and others attempted to give a comprehensive analysis of the stereotypes held in the Middle East. He found strong agreement on personality and intellectual characteristics of stereotypes. An unpublished study by Andersen and MacNeil²⁷ studied the stereotypes resulting from names associated with differing ethnic origins. Responses to many of the ten names used reflected significant differences in perceptions of competence and character dimensions of credibility. Numerous studies of stereotypes resulting from ethnic, racial, regional, and national origin²⁸ clearly demonstrate that the content of stereotypes involve perceptions of personality, intellectual, and/or physical characteristics of persons.

Even within the same cultural, ethnic, regional, and national boundaries, studies of stereotyping as a result of the voice, indicate that stereotyped personality perception results from differing vocal characteristics. Although Kraner²⁹ criticized this conclusion in his examination of the studies, subsequent research by Addington³⁰ has provided substantial confirmation of this stereotyping behavior. Other research has fairly conclusively demonstrated that vocal cues are related to stereotypes of physical and/or intellectual characteristics.³¹ Research suggests that persons readily stereotype age, height, weight, body type, occupation, social class, race, sex, and education on the basis of the voice.³² The accuracy of the stereotypes, of course, varied according to the characteristics under consideration in the studies; however, subjects engaging in the judgments generally agreed or made a stereotyped response. Similar nonverbal communication studies indicate that stereotyped judgments concerning personality and intellect are made on the basis of physical characteristics of persons such as body type, hair, skin color, cosmetics, etc.³³

Derivation from Perceived Socio-Cultural Affiliations

A third aspect of the stereotype model relates to social and cultural affiliations. Centers explained the relation of social and cultural affiliations to stereotypes as follows: "Stereotypes constitute one of the clearest examples we have of socially and culturally acquired cognitive structures."³⁴ Katz expanded upon this view when he wrote that "the superstitions of the culture furnish the individual with ready made categories for his prejudgments in the absence of any experience."³⁵ If the cognitive structure of the stereotype is socially or culturally derived, then the generalized content on personal characteristics is probably sequentially related to those perceived social and cultural affiliations. Thus, the assigned learning basis of the stereotype is the consequence of the cultural and social groups with which one perceives himself as affiliated. In short, the stereotype responses we make toward other persons arise out of what we have learned in social-cultural groups of which we perceive ourselves to be members.

Studies of accented speech patterns³⁶ have demonstrated that people of common linguistic affiliation apply consistent stereotypes to persons of differing speech patterns. In general, studies of racial and ethnic groups have produced similar results.³⁷ For example, Morland and Williams³⁸ studied American Caucasian, American Negro, Asiatic Indian, German Caucasian, and Hong Kong Chinese groups. They found attitudinal differences between all groups in terms of ratings of other ethnic groups, with fairly homogeneous ratings within groups. In addition, groups rated themselves most favorable.

Studies of affiliations within the same culture demonstrate the effect of sub-cultural and social group affiliations. Prothro, mentioned previously, reported six studies which indicated meaningful differences in composition of stereotypes among Lebanese students and adults. Similarly, Roth and Siri³⁹ studied the difference in stereotypes among Hindu groups. One hundred Ss in two groups, students and service-holders (caste), were given a sixty adjective list to evaluate several other Hindu groups. They found a higher degree of stereotype characteristic agreement among the service-holders than among the students who were a less homogeneous group. They also found that the stereotype characteristics were much more negative for the service-holder than the student.

The variation of stereotypes, according to religious and political associations, has been studied by Diab.⁴⁰ In one study, he tested a group of 106 Arab students at the University of Beirut composed of Moslems, Christians, Lebanese, and Non-Lebanese Arabs. Students were categorized according to religion, nationality, and political views. A likert-type scale on the approval of policy of the U.A.R. was used to establish political groups. These groups received a 99 adjective, Katz-Braley-type test device. Diab reported that, according to the religion, nationality, and political view of the Ss, there were significant differences in the characteristics ascribed to various stereotypes tested.

In a subsequent study by Diab,⁴¹ he attempted to measure the effects of group association as 'anchorage points' on the composition of stereotypes. His rationale was that, "if reference groups provide the main internal anchorages for the experience and behavior of individuals, it becomes highly essential to obtain such information about reference group membership of Ss used in studies of group stereotypes."⁴² At the same time, he was attempting to check the effect that the composition of the list of stereotypes had on the characteristics assigned to each one. Three list conditions (negative stereotypes, mixed stereotypes, positive stereotypes) were administered to students of different religious and political backgrounds. The Ss received the standard adjective list with the lists of stereotypes to be evaluated. Diab found that "where attributes of a stereotype are internalized and represent a high ego-involved anchorage, then external factors make no significant difference."⁴³ Also, he reported that when the stereotype lists were not constructed to contain a mixture of positive, negative, and neutral stereotypes, a distortion of perception of the individual stereotypes occurred.

This research clearly points to the conclusion that the content of stereotypes are structured and derived from perceived social and cultural affiliations. Also, the research noted above provides confirmation that the presence of generalized content in the absence of direct information occurs in numerous cultures throughout the world. As Katz commented, "The stereotype will continue to exist so long as people accept consciously or unconsciously, the fallacious group attitudes."⁴⁴

Distortion Through Signal Responses

Another theoretical aspect of the stereotype is related to the type of cognitive response involved in stereotyping behavior. The stereotype is a signal response to symbols that distorts perception. This cognitive behavior appears to be the sequential consequence of the generalized associative learning in the absence of firsthand information brought about by social-cultural group conditioning. The invariate nature of the signal response characteristic of the stereotype may be categorically related to lack of change in basic social and cultural affiliation (see subsequent discussion). A signal response is invariate and occurs without evaluative, cognitive decision that considers specifics of a situation and consequences of behavior. Usual symbolic processing is absent. Lippman apparently recognized this aspect of the stereotype because he commented that, "(stereotype) is a form of perception which imposes a certain character on the data of our senses before data reach intelligence."⁴⁵ Edwards went beyond Lippman's statement and suggested that the "(stereotype) evokes a preconception which he applies and reacts to as if the preconception were the stimulus."⁴⁶ Fotheringham completed the analysis: "The use of words like Communist, Left-winger, Pinko, Wop, Nigger, Redneck, Kike, Hillbilly, are apt to be reacted to signally."⁴⁷ Apparently, then, the stereotype is a signal response in which the individual reacts to the verbal or nonverbal symbol--not the object.

As Giffin and Patton explained, "The general form of stereotyping is to try to fit people into good-bad, black-white, bipolar dichotomies. It is much easier to dismiss an individual totally for one character trait of which we disapprove than to consider the divergent facets of each individual that we encounter."⁴⁸ The result can be that the individual examines verbal and nonverbal cues about a person and because he exhibits a cue attributed to an existing stereotype, he accrues all of the characteristics of that stereotype whether he warrants them or not. In a linguistic sense we react to verbal and nonverbal symbols for the stereotype signally, whether it in truth applies to the concept or not. An example of this type of reaction can be found in a study conducted by Carmichael, Hogan, and Walter.⁴⁹ They found that when Ss were asked to draw the pictures of objects which they had seen labeled earlier (labels were incorrect), the Ss drew pictures which 'pictured' the word-label and not the original picture content. Thus, the Ss reacted to the word-label and not to the object. Apparently, the signal response of the stereotype does produce a similar distortion in the perception of the environment.

Emotional-Evaluative Loading

A fifth component involved in reconceptualization is that the stereotype is an emotionally loaded, evaluative response. Katz supplied an explanation for the derivation of the emotional loading in that "...emotion clings to words through association with emotional events which are never disassociated from the label."⁵⁰ According to Katz, the importance of this emotional loading is that it increases resistance to logic and change and allows old emotions associated with classes of persons and objects to be called up at irrelevant times. Thus, the signal response recalls the emotions associated with stereotypes regardless of the situation.

Research has not directly demonstrated the emotionality of the stereotype. Sri,⁵¹ in a survey of the characteristics of stereotypes university students hold toward different ethnic groups, found that stereotypes clearly exhibit a positive-negative dimension. Edwards⁵² has suggested this good-bad, favorable-unfavorable,

dimensions in his description of intensity and direction of stereotypes. Thus, stereotypes appear to exhibit a favorable-unfavorable dimension.

Prothro⁵³ appears to have come closer to demonstrating the emotional or evaluative loading of the stereotype employing the semantic differential. He asked students in the Middle East to rate the position of a given stereotype according to each adjectival pair. His results, while directed toward creating semantic space models of stereotypes, found in factor analysis three dimensions, evaluative, potency, and activity. The strength of the evaluative dimension in accounting for a large measure of the variance suggests that the stereotype may be evaluatively loaded. Of course, numerous other studies cited previously have found evaluative dimensions of stereotypes to discriminate between groups tested.⁵⁴ Although these results do not demonstrate conclusively that stereotypes are emotionally loaded, when the results are coupled with the theory of the stereotype already discussed, they suggest that the theoretical assumption may be correct.

Time and Change in Stereotyping

A sixth unit in a theoretical conceptualization of stereotyping involves time and change. The stereotype may be viewed as a recurring and relatively fixed response to verbal or nonverbal symbols. The act of stereotyping may be viewed as a transitory, recurring system state. Another theoretical position that is more or less consistent with this view has been advanced by Carter⁵⁵ who views stereotyping as a process. Congruity theory as described by Osgood and Tannenbaum⁵⁶ provides an important insight into this process. The tendency to maintain congruent perceptions and avoid differentiation between associated objects of judgment partially explains stereotyping behavior. The process by which simplification-congruence is actually maintained, however, may be closely related to assimilation and contrast effects observed in social judgment theory. An individual attempts to simplify by viewing an individual (specie) in the same frame of reference as the class or group (genus) to which he is perceived as belonging. He is assimilated into the group without differentiation. Thus, stereotyping involves maintenance of congruent perceptions through a generalization process of simplification. Change in stereotypes by an individual should be positively related to his perceived changes of social group affiliations and to the rate of perceived social and cultural change. Since stereotypes are sequentially related to perceived affiliations, then change in stereotypes should covary with meaningful change in group affiliations. The rate of change in culturally based (derived) stereotypes should be positively related to the rate of change within the culture that the individual participates in. The question as to whether time is a factor in stereotyping has been examined by several researchers. Dudrycha⁵⁷ compared the perception of Germans before and during World War II by Americans. Employing the Katz-Braley adjective list, he found a strong change toward the negative for the stereotype of German. Meenes⁵⁸ reported a study done at Howard University which compared the stereotype survey taken in 1935 and the one done during 1942. The nationalities being tested were all involved on one side or the other during World War II. As would be expected, he found that those nationalities fighting with the allies became more favorable, and those fighting against the allies became less favorable.

Stagner and Osgood⁵⁹ introduced one of the early uses of the semantic differentials in stereotype research. Eight concepts were rated on 64 scales by groups of adults and students between 1944 and 1946. They, too, found that the war had caused a change in the favorable-unfavorable dimension of the stereotypes.

Seago⁶⁰ reported no change in stereotypes during the war. In a study of three nationality and one racial groups, she found no degree of change as a result of the war. The 'non-change results' may have been a result of an all female sample, and the fact that the initial measurement of the stereotypes was taken well into the war and towards the end of the war.

Also, Gilbert⁶¹ found that the stereotypes had not changed in characteristics. He did report that fewer people agreed on the five most marked characteristics than earlier in the study. This he attributed to a lessening tendency to stereotype among the population. In reality, the fact that the subjects at Princeton had changed from elite-well-to-do students to a post World War II mixture of races and backgrounds would certainly account for the change in characteristic frequency.

Centers⁶² reported that he had adapted the Katz-Braley technique to the classroom. He placed the names of the ten groups used by Katz and Braley on the blackboard and then read them lists of characteristics associated with those groups in the Katz-Braley study. They were told to write the words which best described the groups. He concluded that the results were the same, although the studies were separated by 18 years and 3,000 miles. Hoult⁶³ attempted exact replication of Centers' studies at the University of New Mexico and at Centers' home University. In both instances, he found significantly different results from Centers' original findings. Employing the present list of characteristics may have the same effect identified by Diab of distorting the perception of the stereotypes, or the three populations may have been of significantly different backgrounds and thereby exhibited different characteristics associated with the stereotypes.

Diab⁶⁴ replicated the Prothro and Melekian⁶⁵ study of students with subjects selected from students in the Middle East at the American University of Beirut. Diab reported that the results of the Katz-Braley adjective list indicated very little change in perception of stereotypes of groups. The fact that the emotional level of the conditions surrounding the Middle East had not changed for the better between 1954 and 1962, may very well explain the results.

Two final replications of the Katz-Braley study were reported by researchers in 1969⁶⁶ and 1970.⁶⁷ Their results demonstrated that, while essential characteristics of some of the stereotypes had changed (notably the Negro), the frequency of response equaled or surpassed the high stereotype orientation found by Katz-Braley. The conclusion that can be drawn from these and earlier studies is that, unless there is major social or cultural change which directly affects the stereotype referent groups (such as in the Black Militant Movement) or the individual's affiliations, change for stereotypes is very slow indeed.

Summary and Propositional Extensions

Theory and research provide ample rationale for reconceptualizing the concept of stereotype. Apparently, stereotyping is a relatively unchanging, emotionally loaded signal response which distorts decoding and accuracy of understanding. The content of the stereotype---personality, intellectual, and physical characteristics of persons---is derived from perceived social-cultural affiliations rather than direct sensory experience with the referent. The generalized nature of the stereotype response is, therefore, a result of assigned learning through association with other verbal or nonverbal symbols whose content is conditioned in group affiliations. The act of stereotyping may be viewed as a transitory system state characterized by the above conditions.

Based upon a model of this nature, derivation of theoretical propositions is possible. Stereotyping is a transitory, recurring system state characterized by a process of generalization and simplification which maintains congruent, non-differentiating perceptions. Stereotyping is a signal rather than a symbolic process; it restricts differentiation of similarly perceived stimuli. Subsequent experience with the referent object-person of a stereotype (or experience with the symbol representing the person) is decoded according to the pre-existing stereotype--assimilated into the existing frame of reference. Therefore, this state reduces decoding options and interferes with accuracy of perception and understanding. A stereotype is the sequential consequence of that decoding behavior. The content of stereotypes is the perceived personality, intellectual, and/or physical characteristics of persons or groups. The presence of stereotype content is categorically related to the absence of direct, sensory knowledge of the referent object of the stereotype. Stereotype content is derived from assigned learning through association with the verbal and nonverbal symbols rather than objects-persons in reality.

Stereotypes maintain congruent, nondifferentiating perceptions of genus-specie relationships. A person who is perceived to be a member of a meaningfully different group (social, cultural), will be stereotyped as having the same personal characteristics as the perceived characteristics of the group as a whole. An individual will process a stereotype response to groups (cultures) which he perceives as meaningfully different from groups with which he is affiliated. Stereotypes are derived from the symbolic interaction and associational conditioning of perceived social-cultural affiliations. Stereotypes held by persons who perceive themselves as members of the same social-cultural affiliations are homogeneous. Similarity of stereotypes among persons is positively related to frequency of perceived common social-cultural affiliations. Change in stereotypes covaries with meaningful changes in perceived social-group affiliations. Change in stereotypes may also covary with actual changes in the nature or structure of social or cultural groups (i.e., Black Militancy). The rate of change in stereotypes is positively related to the rate of change of the society or culture with which individuals--groups perceive they are affiliated.

FOOTNOTES

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